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BOOK REVIEWS

THE REVIVAL OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR

THE study of English grammar consisted for a long time in applying rules modeled upon those of the highly inflected Latin language to the facts of the English tongue, which is almost wholly uninflected. The difficulties and discrepancies which resulted from this unwise procedure were tacitly assumed to be due to the defects of the English tongue. The coat was all right, but the boy was too small. As we shall see, the study of English grammar has by no means freed itself, even now, from misleading rules and statements borrowed from Latin grammar. But a new day has surely dawned when a leading scholar argues, in a remarkable book, that the grammatical system of modern English is distinctly superior to that of older English and other highly inflected languages." The present writer believes that the argument of Professor Jespersen, in its main lines, is unanswerable. The history of language is a record of progress, not of decay and retrogression, and the modern analytic tongues are an improvement upon the older synthetic type. It is safe to say that the fixed word-order, the freedom from inflections, and the abundant use of prepositions and auxiliary verbs, which characterize modern English, are a distinct improvement upon the contrasted phenomena of the older languages.

Richard Grant White, in his striking book, Words and Their Uses (1870), stated flatly that "nearly all of our so-called English grammar is mere make-believe grammar" (p. 304). He declared, among other things, that in English "the verb needs not, and generally does not, agree with its nominative case in number and person:
... active verbs do not govern the objective case, or any other: prepositions do not govern the objective case, or any other "(p. 296). These statements may seem extreme; but there are many suggestions in White's remarkable book which our text-books upon English grammar should have adopted before this. The objective case of nouns, for example, does not exist in present English, and therefore should not be talked about. It is as purely a myth as Sairey Gamp's "Mrs. Harris." Professor Whitney tells us frankly in his Essentials of English Grammar;

There is no noun in our language which really has an objective case. . . . Still, partly by analogy with the pronouns, and partly because many other languages related with English, and even the English itself in earlier times, do distinguish the object from the subject in nouns as well as in pronouns, we usually speak of nouns as having an objective case (p. 32).

The fact that earlier English and other languages show an objective case of nouns may well be one of the main reasons why we still speak of such a case in discussing present English; but, in reality, this fact is a powerful argument against doing so. The objective case of nouns is not merely a figment as regards the speech of today; it is something which the language has rejected. It represents the Egypt from which we have come out. It is, therefore, not a harmless fiction; it is a harmful falsehood.

But may we not call each distinct use of a noun a separate case? This would *Progress in Language, Otto Jespersen, Ph.D., Swan Sonnenschein & Co. 1894.

disregard the older conception according to which each separate form of a noun is a case. Among the grammars to be mentioned later, that of Professor Carpenter talks of the "dative case" of nouns, and that of Harvey of the "absolute case." But why not give also a "vocative case," and an "adverbial case"? And should not the use of nouns after prepositions be distinguished from their use after transitive verbs, giving a "prepositional case"? It is plain that there is little to be gained and much to be lost by giving to the word "case" a new meaning, in order to accommodate the teachers of English grammar.

That the finite verb agrees with its subject is still taught in English grammars to the confusion of pupils and the despair of teachers. In each of the expressions nos amamus, vos amatis, and illi amant, the verb actually agrees with its subject. As all understand, the form amamus cannot be used except when the subject is in the first person and plural number. This is agreement, grammatical concord. It is such facts as this that gave rise to the whole body of grammatical doctrine on this subject. To say that the verb agrees with its subject in number and person in the expressions I love, we love, you love, they love, is a deliberate ignoring—rather a flat falsification, of the facts of the case. Instead of accepting the plain reality that Latin here has agreement between the verb and subject, and that English has not, we get up a purely metaphysical agreement, and waste our time and confuse our minds by parsing something which does not exist. One might as well discuss whether Sairey Gamp's "Mrs. Harris" was a blonde or a brunette. As White puts it: "Children are required to cite a rule which they cannot understand, as the law of a relation which does not exist" (p. 304).

Why, then, should our elaborate system of "make-believe grammar" have free course and be glorified? In such expressions as I am, he is, he loves, the verb does agree with its subject in number and person; and it is well to say so. In I love, we love, you love, they love, the verb in each case is used with, but does not agree with, its subject. In some of the forms of the verb to be, and in the rare forms in -est used with thou as subject, we have actual agreement between verb and subject. Outside of these cases there is no agreement of the finite verb with its subject in person and number, except in the third person singular of the present indicative, as in he loves. To parse agreement whenever a distinct form of the verb marks a particular number (as in are and were), or whenever a distinct form marks a particular person and number (as in am, is, and loves), and to say nothing about agreement when there is no such distinct form, is the simple rule that the present writer would urge upon all teachers who are able to see the matter as he does.

The uselessness of "make-believe grammar" was undoubtedly responsible for a marked reaction against all formal teaching of English grammar, which was very noticeable for a time. This movement received emphatic expression when the Connecticut State Board of Education discontinued the state examinations in English grammar, giving the following reasons:

- (1) The study of grammar or analysis does not help us either to speak or write our language. (2) As a study technical grammar is hateful to any child, and belongs to our advanced course, if anywhere. Its use in an elementary school is contrary to all approved pedagogical theories. (3) There is not time for such work and for other subjects that belong to our civilization. (4) We are convinced that the discipline said to be derived from the study of grammar can be secured by the study of other subjects: for instance natural science, which of itself furnishes practical knowledge.
- ¹ Cited in F. A. BARBOUR'S *History of English Grammar Teaching, Educational Review*, December, 1896. Date of action of Connecticut board not given, but previous to March, 1891.

The statements just quoted are not generally accepted today. Beginning with Samuel S. Green's English Analysis, published in 1847, routine parsing has been supplemented more and more by sentence analysis and practice in the forming of sentences. The intelligent analysis of English sentences is really an analysis of the processes of thought there expressed. This discipline is fundamental and of the highest value; it sharpens the student's powers of insight and discrimination, and helps him directly in every department of his work. That the study of grammar and analysis is now generally accepted as indispensable is indicated by the Report of the Committee of Fifteen, and by the great number of text-books on this subject which are constantly appearing, at some of which we are to glance. The Committee of Fifteen tells us that grammar "has long held sway in the schools as the disciplinary study par excellence;" and that "a survey of its educational value usually produces the conviction that it is to retain the first place in the future."

With the study of sentence analysis came the reign of the diagram. "Grammar," said a wag, "means diagram-mar." A diagram is almost necessarily misleading in many ways; and the pupil who employs it is not compelled, as he should be, to hold in his mind all the parts and relations of the sentence. The half-mechanical accomplishment of diagramming comes to be sought rather than an intimate comprehension of the sentence; those peculiar features of a sentence which cannot be diagrammed are lost sight of; and the time which should be given up to oral analysis and the accompanying practice in oral expression is wasted in constructing mystic circles, branching trees, and grammatical chicken-coops. Of the text-books which are to be noticed in this paper, those of Allen, Kimball, Kittredge, and Wisely, make no use whatever of the sentence-diagram.

However, if any teacher burdened with large classes finds that it is practically necessary to make use at times of some device by which the entire class can be set at work together, and by which each student's knowledge of the relations existing between the different parts of a number of sentences can be rapidly tested, that teacher is recommended to glance at the method of written analysis set forth in English Grammar and Composition,² by Gordon A. Southworth. According to this system a written analysis of the sentence is made without rewriting it. This is accomplished by the use of underscoring, overscoring, parentheses, brackets, etc. The time and labor involved in writing the sentence more than once, and the false conceptions which spring from putting it into some twisted form, are all saved. Since the symbols are plainly meaningless in themselves, the child recognizes them as purely arbitrary devices.

In Mr. Southworth's book "composition" and "sentence-structure" are treated before the separate parts of speech. The discussion of "case as a form" and "case as a relation" (pp. 162–166) seems to the present reviewer to be the most complete and satisfactory presentation of the subject of case which he has found in any school grammar. The view presented is that "nouns have two case-forms or cases—the general or common form, for all uses but one; and the special or possessive form, used to show ownership or possession." However, the traditional doctrine of three cases in nouns is also presented in full, for the use of those who prefer the accustomed formulas.

Let us now take up one by one a number of recent books on English grammar.

¹See Gertrude Buck, The Sentence-Diagram, Educational Review, March, 1897.

² T. R. SHEWELL & Co., second edition, 1901.

Harvey's New English Grammar, a revision of an older book, begins with dry definitions. Such an introduction seems to the present writer to be very unwise; the young student is hardly asked or expected to do any thinking. The definitions of "orthography" and "etymology" (p. 13) are surprising; but the way in which they are plumped into the child's mind is the prime mistake. Surely the present grammatical usage calls those verbs "impersonal" which are here termed "unipersonal" (p. 124). The book has a thorough index to its grammatical nuggets.

The method of MacEwan's Essentials of the English Sentence² is well suggested in the following extract from the preface: "Positive, categorical statement of established elementary facts, with apt and abundant verification, is an economical method of reviewing as well as of communicating such facts." This dogmatic method is consistently observed. A prospective view of each section is given by an introductory chart, and a review is afforded by a summary at the close. MacEwan's book is based upon Whitney's Essentials of English Grammar; but it seems to the present writer that the most admirable feature in that excellent book was its inductive method. It is sufficiently clear to say, "A transitive verb expresses an action terminating on an object" (MacEwan, p. 45); but Whitney stimulates the student to think, and helps him to recognize that grammatical terms are conventional and often unsatisfactory, when he first presents a number of sentences in which the verbs take objects, and then says concerning them:

A verb of [this] class is said to be a TRANSITIVE verb, or to be used TRANSITIVELY (transitive means "going over," that is, the action of the verb is fancifully said to "pass over" from the subject to an object) (p. 100).

The text-books of Miss Hyde and Professor Allen are intended to be used in the higher grades of grammar schools. Miss Hyde ³ combines much practice in composition with grammatical study. Her book is mainly inductive in its method; it seems to be the well-considered production of a skillful teacher.

Professor Allen's little work 4 is the briefest among those here reviewed. The study of composition and grammar at the same time is not attempted. The mode of presenting the subject is dogmatic; but the statements made are so clear, sane, and wisely put, that the evils of this method are very much mitigated. The judgment and discrimination of the pupil are appealed to. The statement concerning the nature of pronouns (p. 52) and the treatment of the subjunctive mood (pp. 143-6) may be especially commended. The treatment of what is sometimes called the potential mood will be discussed later.

The following extracts will give some idea of the book of Brown and De Garmo:5

¹THOMAS W. HARVEY, A New English Grammar, 277 pp. American Book Co., 1900.

- ²ELIAS J. MACEWAN, The Essentials of the English Sentence, 310 pp. D. C. Heath & Co., 1900.
- ³ MARY F. HYDE, Practical English Grammar, with Exercises in Composition, 328 pp. D. C. Heath & Co., 1900. (Book II of "A Two-Book Course in English.")
- ⁴EDWARD A. ALLEN, A School Grammar of the English Language, 168 pp. D. C. Heath & Co., 1900.
- ⁵GEORGE P. BROWN, assisted by CHARLES DE GARMO, *Elements of English Grammar*, 255 pp. Werner School Book Co., 1900.

The commanding purpose of Part I is: (1) to lead the pupils to distinguish between ideas and thoughts, and the words and sentences that express them; and (2) to show that the relations of words, phrases, and clauses in a sentence depend upon the relations between the ideas that form the thought which the sentence expresses (p. 8).

The *idea*, forests, is the picture that I form in my mind of large collections of trees. The *word*, forests, is the group of letters used in writing it, or the group of

sounds used in speaking it (p. 25).

Much practice may be necessary in order to make clear the distinction between the object as perceived by the senses and the idea or notion of it that is retained in the mind (p. 12).

It seems to the present writer that the psychology imported into this grammar is sometimes harmful rather than helpful. The suggested exercises in discriminating between the word and its meaning would easily become as formal and lifeless as anything in the older methods of grammar-study. Is it either desirable or possible to be always making two bites of a cherry in this way? Do the authors do it themselves when they tell us that "a preposition always connects some object-word to some other word whose meaning the object-word modifies"? (P. 34.) It is the meaning of the object-word that modifies the meaning of the other word. Professor Kittredge says with truth in the preface of a book that we shall soon consider: "A studious effort to separate the name from the thing named may be important for the philosopher, but it is only baffling to the beginner. Surely there is no danger that the youngest child will ever mistake the word apple for the object which bears that name!"

The grammar of E. Oram Lyte r pays much attention to composition. In studying the sentence before the parts of speech the book agrees with a number of recent text-books. The present reviewer cannot believe that the elaborate, cabalistic systems of written analysis and written parsing which are much emphasized in this book represent wise methods of instruction.

Of the two books by John B. Wisely, that entitled Studies in the Science of English Grammar is the more original and important. Its purpose is stated as follows:

It has been the purpose of the author to present suitable sentences, and to ask such questions upon them as will lead the student to construct the science of grammar for himself. To this end, all definitions and statements of facts of whatever kind have been studiously avoided, as depriving the student of so much mental activity as would be required in thinking them out for himself. . . . There is no need of committing any law or principle of grammar from a text-book. The laws and principles which underlie the construction of sentences, are all embodied in sentences, and the student may study them directly, first hand, just as he studies the flower in botany or the rock in geology; and if he forget the rule, he has only to examine a few sentences and restate it for himself.

This book is certainly a very thoroughgoing attempt to teach English grammar inductively. Of course, the induction is carefully guided, and each one of the various problems is separated from irrelevant matter. The present writer believes that a skillful and patient teacher could achieve excellent results with this stimulating book; but it might be necessary to depart at various points from the ideal of the author. Indeed, it may be said that Mr. Wisely departs from the ideal himself by giving references under each subject to various school grammars of the usual type. The use of these references would result in the inductive study of grammars, not of grammar.

- ¹ Advanced Grammar and Composition, 368 pp., American Book Co., 1899.
- ¹ Studies in the Science of English Grammar, 185 pp.; A New English Grammar, 227 pp.; The Inland Publishing Co., Terre Haute, Ind.

The books of Brown and DeGarmo, and that of Wisely, insist that the assertive sentence is made up of three parts. Mrs. Mead r says very sensibly:

One would naturally expect the sentence to correspond as to number of parts with the judgment which it expresses; but since we commonly find the copula and attribute combined in one symbol, as, The horse runs (= is running), it is convenient to include these two offices under the term predicate, and so to divide the sentence into two parts only." (P. 21.) Here and elsewhere Mrs. Mead wisely refuses to let the supposed demands of psychology and logic complicate and hinder the teaching of English grammar. The discussion of nouns (pp. 53-8), and what is said about the use and the danger of diagrams (pp. 236-7), are specimen portions of a helpful, judicious text-book.

Five books will now be considered which well represent the new emphasis upon the teaching of English grammar. The oldest one of these appeared in 1896. With the probable exception of the one by Kittredge and Arnold these grammars are all planned for use in the high school. All five aim to teach grammar and not composition. The full titles of the books in question are given below.²

[Professor] G. R. CARPENTER, *Principles of English Grammar*, x + 254 pp., The Macmillan Co., 1898.

HERBERT J. DAVENPORT and ANNA M. EMERSON, The Principles of Grammar, xiv + 268 pp., The Macmillan Co., 1898.

H. G. BUEHLER, A Modern English Grammar, viii + 300 pp., Newson & Co., 1900.

[Professor] GEORGE L. KITTREDGE and SARAH L. ARNOLD, The Mother Tongue, Book II, An Elementary English Grammar, xxii+331 pp., Ginn & Co., 1900.

The so-called "potential mood" is a difficult matter to treat wisely and helpfully. Whitney's classification of the verb-phrases with may, can, must, might, could, would, should, and ought to, into potential, conditional, and obligative forms, or modes (Essentials, §§ 287-91), does not seem to the present writer to be really illuminating. It will be interesting to note how this matter is handled by the five books that are now before us. It will be best to omit from consideration the form ought to.

The book of Kittredge and Arnold is the only one of the five which does not attempt to discriminate in some way between the so-called "indicative use" and the "subjunctive use" of these auxiliaries. Baskervill and Sewell say: "May is used as either indicative or subjunctive, as it has two meanings. It is indicative when it expresses permission, or, as it sometimes does, ability, like the word can: it is subjunctive when it expresses doubt as to the reality of an action, or when it expresses wish, purpose, etc." (p. 160). Professor Carpenter speaks of certain uses of may as "equivalents of the subjunctive" (p. 134). Davenport and Emerson state that "the potential mood is omitted, because, if thought be adopted as the basis of classification, there is no room for a potential, all the forms which are commonly put in this mood naturally falling within the indicative or the subjunctive" (p. 88). Buehler assigns to the subjunctive mood in addition to the forms generally placed there, certain "phrasal subjunctives" (p. 249), formed by means of may and other auxiliaries. Kittredge and

¹IRENE M. MEAD, The English Language and its Grammar, 277 pp., Silver, Burdett, & Co., 1896.

² [Professor] W. M. BASKERVILL and J. W. SEWELL, An English Grammar, 349 pp., American Book Co., 1896.

Arnold call all the forms with may, can, must, might, could, would, and should, "potential verb-phrases" (p. 283), and simply ask that the force of each phrase be pointed out in the sentence in which it occurs. In spite of the unfortunate use of the word "potential," this method of treating these expressions seems sensible and practical.

Professor Allen, in the book already mentioned, applies the term "modal auxiliaries" to may, can, must, might, could, would, and should; and gives a clear tabular statement of the different uses of each word. He would distinguish between the indicative and subjunctive uses of each auxiliary.

The subjunctive mood has so nearly died out of everyday English that it becomes a questionable and hazardous proceeding to give to "the subjunctive idea" a distinct metaphysical existence, and then to use this fictitious entity to conjure with. For most of the so-called subjunctive uses of the auxiliaries that we are now discussing, no regular subjunctive forms can possibly be substituted. The present writer is well satisfied with the term "modal auxiliaries" or "auxiliaries of mood" as a name for the seven words concerned; and he believes that the pupil should be able to point out the exact force of a verb-phrase made with one of these in any given sentence. Farther than this he would not go. In view of the fact that Professor Allen calls may indicative in "I may go" (= It is possible that I shall go) (p. 148), while Davenport and Emerson call it subjunctive (p. 89), it seems best not to raise the question at all in an ordinary grammar class. "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" At this point there is a good chance to lop off some "make-believe grammar."

The sensible "Introduction" of Baskervill and Sewell makes a favorable impression. Their grammar is both scholarly and practical. The section on "Words that Need Watching" is an excellent feature. It seems a questionable policy, however, to give up more than two-thirds of the book to a detailed study of the separate parts of speech before the treatment of the sentence is reached.

Professor Carpenter's grammar offers in Part I of its appendix probably the clearest and best elementary statement that exists concerning the nature and classification of English sounds, and the relation of the dictionary to standard pronunciation. This section is contributed by Professor E. H. Babbitt. Part V of the appendix contains a bibliography which will be of great service to teachers. This is the first school grammar to adopt from Sweet the helpful classification of verbs into consonant verbs (weak) and vowel verbs (strong). Professor Carpenter's independence of traditional grammar may be seen in his judgment that the sentence "Who did you see?" can scarcely be regarded as incorrect in colloquial English (p. 87). Minor points in this excellent book to which I object are: that the indirect object is named "the dative case" (pp. 63, 70); and that the auxiliary be is said to be used "in the future tenses of the active voice" (p. 130), as in the sentence "I am going to the city tomorrow." It seems to the present writer unwise to give two different names to the form him, and two different names to the form am going (is, are going). When him is used as the indirect object, that fact should be pointed out, and the same is true when am going has a future meaning; but is it not extremely desirable that each of these forms shall have a fixed name?

Davenport and Emerson seek to present the "principles of grammar" in such a way as to "avoid placing the teacher of foreign languages at cross purposes with the teacher of English—to the end that one instructor may not laboriously unteach what the other has as laboriously taught." The following words from the introductory

"note to the teacher" deserve to be placed on the wall of every room where instruction is given in English grammar:

Do not insist greatly upon formal classifications; thought and not form is of leading importance. Welcome from the student the widest range of interpretation of the sentence under examination; the syntax may often assume several different aspects accordingly as [according as] the thought is capable of being conceived in different shades of meaning.

Encourage the pupil to disagree with text-book and teacher, and to attempt on his own responsibility the making of generalizations. His habit of thought is of vastly greater importance than his conclusions. Doubtless there is danger of excess here, but likewise there is valuable opportunity for teaching the virtue of temperate disagreement (p. viii).

The present reviewer has found this book very sane and discriminating. Teachers will be helped by the appendix, where some questions are discussed more fully than was desirable in the body of the work.

The author of Buehler's A Modern English Grammar is himself engaged in the work of secondary instruction. The book begins with the study of the sentence, and the subject of sentence analysis is practically completed before the study of the parts of speech is taken up. Typographically this grammar is a model; and the illustrative sentences are so printed as to make clear through the eye the grammatical and logical relations that are to be brought out. This is accomplished without distorting the sentences, except in a few "diagrams." The prime intention of the few exercises in composition is to impress grammatical and logical distinctions upon the mind of the pupil. Buehler treats infinitives and participles as separate parts of speech. Will this prove to be a new application of the maxim "Divide and conquer"?

The Mother Tongue, Book II, of Kittredge and Arnold, is An Elementary English Grammar. Some points in this book have already been commented on. A marked characteristic is the presence of notes in fine type explaining some of the more striking facts of historical English grammar. This idea is an admirable one. Although the pupils are not expected to learn these paragraphs, it is often as easy to understand the real origin of an idiom as it is to form for one's self a vague and misleading conception of the matter. Good examples of these notes are found on pages 129, 163, 211. Many careful directions are given to teachers, suggesting how each portion of the work may best be taken up and the points at which reviews may profitably be made, and indicating the purpose of particular sections. The caution against supplying words for mere convenience in parsing (p. 191) is an instance of the careful way in which dangers are guarded against. The book seems a noteworthy combination of sound scholarship and skillful pedagogy.

Believing that "a rational investigation of the structure of English sentences is far more important than any other phase of grammar," Miss Kimball has written The English Sentence ¹ "not to supplant any text-book in grammar, but rather to provide for a profitable continuation of grammar study in high schools and normal schools." This useful little work is devoted entirely to the analysis of sentences. Miss Kimball is discriminating, and while pointing out distinctions clearly, does not attempt to determine everything. The impossibility of always distinguishing between the infinitive in -ing and the participle of the same form is well brought out (p. 142).

¹ LILLIAN G. KIMBALL, The Structure of the English Sentence, vi + 244 pp., American Book Co., 1900.

The expressions "recasted sentences" (p. 14), and "I would have found" (p. 88), should be corrected.

It may be well, in conclusion, to speak of a few books of reference on English grammar. The New English Dictionary (the Clarendon Press), of which Vol. V has appeared, going through the letter K, is the great authority on the history of the meanings and forms of English words. Bain's Higher English Grammar (Holt & Co.) is a useful handbook; it has a full table of contents, but no index. Teachers who read German can find in Mätzner's great Englische Grammatik (3 vols., Berlin) the stores of material from which many shorter grammars have been made. The second volume of Storm's Englische Philologie (2d ed., in 2 vols., Leipzig, 1896) contains careful summaries of the important books upon present English usage, colloquialisms, vulgarisms, etc. The full index to all this material, and Storm's own judicious comments, make his compilation more useful for most purposes than the original works themselves. Incidental mention has already been made of Sweet's New English Grammar (Part I, 1891; Part II, 1898; the Clarendon Press). This striking work is commended to the attention of teachers. Since Sweet delights in discussing grammatical matters in an original way, and freely invents new terms when he feels in need of them, only those who are willing to do some thinking will be helped by this stimulating book.

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